

very difficulty of formulating an aesthetic and personal project when the demands of outside forces cannot be denied. Nixon gives us the turn toward the self; we need now to investigate more carefully what we mean by self—can it be found unambiguously in unpublished writing? Can we talk about authenticity without properly addressing evasion, fraudulence, and history? And, how do we reconcile the sturdy construction of ‘Beckett’, the Author, in Beckett studies with his alleged self-inscription as the Unnamable, say, a work that devastatingly annihilates subjectivity? As Beckett writes in his diary “‘the book, picture, music, etc. is incidental, what matters, the primary, is the illumination by which they are the vulgarisations, falsifications’” (qtd. 185). Whatever the answer to those old questions—and better ones besides—Nixon’s superb documentation ensures that later critics will make fewer factual errors answering them.

James McNaughton

DOI: 10.3366/jobs.2013.0076

Llewellyn Brown, *Beckett, les fictions brèves: voir et dire*, Caen: Lettres modernes Minard, 2008. 235pp. EUR 30, paperback. ISBN: 978-2-256-91139-2.

In *Beckett, les fictions brèves: voir et dire* (*Beckett, Short Fictions: Seeing and Saying*) Llewellyn Brown has produced a clever and original work dedicated to Samuel Beckett’s short fictions. These texts, belonging to a period that extends from *Texts for Nothing* to *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho*, have received relatively little critical attention, and the author succeeds in illuminating their poetic project from the inside. Brown not only resists simplistic labels such as ‘New Theatre’ but also the kind of thematic or metaphysical approaches to Beckett’s work that would give us the comfortable but misleading image of a unified Beckettian ‘vision of the world’. Instead of such approaches, he chooses to analyse—in the psychoanalytic sense of the term—the very structure of the language of those fictions, paying specific attention to the recurrence of a structural trait of which the effects appear to constitute a series. This trait is the scission that Brown identifies between saying and seeing, a scission that underlies the whole of

these poetic and minimalist fictions – minimalist in that rather than presenting a plot or real characters, they present figures reduced to the bare bones of human existence.

Using Lacanian psychoanalysis as his theoretical framework, Brown traces in these short texts what Lacan calls the inscription of the signifier in the Real, in which the *signifier* is constantly defeated by the *letter*, since, in its material but enigmatic dimension, the letter creates a hole in the knowing. This hole, which marks the unbearable and unnamable presence of the Real, Brown chooses to call the *Void*, articulated as it is onto two other orders, the Imaginary (the *Image*) and the Symbolic (the *Utterance*). *Void*, *Image* and *Utterance* hence become the three poles of a triangular structure borrowed from the Lacanian topology that the author sketches out: it is this relationship – the gap – between saying and seeing that constitutes the matrix of Brown's study.

The first section of the book, entitled *Structure of the Writing*, is thus dedicated to clarifying this topology. First of all, the places that constitute the background of Beckett's fictions are always empty spaces that are impossible to localize or to link to any imaginary representation. Secondly, building on Henri Rey-Flaud's *L'éloge du rien*,¹ Brown explains how the entrance into the symbolic structure that develops subjectivity involves a three-phase process – an initial loss; the alienation of the Signifier; the separation from that Signifier – so that the subject constructs for himself an identity made of semblances that can make him count as one among others. Any failure in that process of establishing a clear split between the big Other and the subject (a mortification of the big Other, represented by the bar that Lacan strikes through the letter 'A' symbolizing the Other) inevitably leads to a form of alienation of the latter. Accordingly, Beckett is seen constantly to exploit the structural possibility involved in the scission between the 'I' and the 'He'. While on the one hand the figure appears to be a subjectivity lacking any imaginary base – a pure singularity without any representation of himself – on the other hand the 'He' actually functions as a reserve of representations, but is impossible to knot with the subject, who remains absent from the imaginary scene. It is for this reason that the tripartite logic cannot be effective, since the third component of the triangle, the 'you' potentially linking the two other poles, fails retroactively to offer the subject

his significations and to accomplish this knotting. Hence the Beckettian subject is damned to oscillate between pure Utterance and impersonal Image, and is finally left to face his unnamable Void. This fundamental dislocation of structure—the Beckettian figure can *hear* some words and *see* some images, but never connect them together—generates a potentially infinite number of literary achievements, which the three remaining sections of Brown's study analyse within the texts themselves.

First, Brown examines the aspect of the Utterance (the Symbolic). In short fictions such as *Company*, *Texts for Nothing* or *How It Is*, the subject is materialized through a figure lying in the mud and darkness—or rather in the 'dim', because the light is structural and thus can never disappear—and is forced to listen to a voice continuously whispering to him. This mute voice proves to be a source of persecution for the subject, in the sense that it is experienced as external to him, that it is impossible to stop it and that it reduces this subject to the mere act of speech. This impersonal and alienating instance from which the subject cannot escape turns out, according to Llewellyn Brown, to be similar to 'the Thing' (the Freudian *Das Ding*): a pure and empty utterance, speaking from the Void meaningless words that only form a monologue and deconstruct any real and credible identity into which the Beckettian subject could project itself. As a matter of fact, the 'I' rather appears as a 'Not I', barred by this impossible obligation of representing itself by means of those words, but remaining unable to do so. Nevertheless, each text attempts to give this voice a concrete incarnation, for example by describing the figure's postures in the mud. Hence the voice is torn between the pole of the Void on the one hand and the pole of the Image on the other, leaving the subject unable to establish any relationship between the signifiers which it is compelled to utter and the signified. Therefore these fictions show the subject going again and again through the chain of signifiers in a metonymic process, without uttering any word that would constitute an unequivocal affirmation and that would allow for a firm grip on the Image.

Secondly, there is the Image (the Imaginary). Compared to the persecuting voice, the Image seems to be peaceful and soothing—while the voice functions as the Real which pierces the screen of the Symbolic, the image on the contrary neutralizes the

anguish caused by the sudden appearance of the Thing. In fact, the Image carries along all that fails for the subject, identity and significations, so that the 'up there' of the Image looks like an ideal paradise; however it is always a lost paradise, seeing that the Image remains a simple stereotype or cliché which does not affect the subject in any way, leaving him away from the realm of representation, free of any imaginary semblance. Once again, the knot between the 'I' and the 'He' is impossible in Beckett's writing, the 'I' only giving the illusion of being a real character. What is thus left for the subject expelled from the paradise of the Imaginary, is the desperate attempt to coincide with the signifier as a pure symbolic instance, in a language rid of all ambiguities – the perfect mathematical language of the grammar or the awkward geometrical alphabet that the Beckettian figure forms with its body. Nonetheless, the consequence of this ever-defeated temptation to create the ideal Image or to merge with the mortifying purity of language, is the decay of the subject itself, which becomes a waste – yet those scraps of bodies are still *something* instead of *nothing*. By contrast, other short fictions, such as *Ill Seen Ill Said*, stage – as a consequence of the failure of the process of representing the subject – the 'spectralisation' of its image: because it cannot inhabit its own body and is subjected to the look of the Other, the figure becomes a sort of ghost whose Image, mortified as a gravestone, remains dwelling in the 'between-two-deaths'.

Thirdly, there is the pole of the Void (the Real). Rejected from the luminous realm of the ideal semblance, excluding any singularity, and therefore the pure point of utterance alone in the 'dim' light, the subject is thus abandoned into the scission separating the two poles, facing the third pole, the Void. Nevertheless, at this point it is precisely the letter that comes to interfere: the writing still accomplishes its function, which is the veiling of the Thing, protecting the subjectivity from it, replacing it by the production of what Brown calls (after Beckett in *Le monde et le pantalon*) the 'pure object'. This 'pure object', which appears as the final motive of the letter, and is intended to furnish a mediation in the scission between saying and seeing, is the iconic form that the writing gives to the impossible. This visual artefact – a skull for example, or a white screen – is thus allowed to take various aspects: each one of Beckett's texts invents a singular

way of representing what cannot be represented. Llewellyn Brown eventually demonstrates this by closing his book with a subtle analysis of a selection of Beckett's short fictions in order to enlighten the efficient but precarious attempt to tame the Real by constructing this paradoxical object – precarious because whatever the form they might take, none of these objects can ever constitute an ultimate resolution. As a consequence, the end itself never belongs to the level of representation in the writing – which remains equivocal – but only to the writing itself, the literary act of closing a text, where the writer leaves his own signature detached from the Unnamable.

Isabelle Ost

DOI: 10.3366/jobs.2013.0077

NOTES

1. Rey-Flaud, Henri (1996), *L'éloge du rien. Pourquoi L'obsessionnel et le pervers échouent là où l'hystérique réussit*, Paris: Seuil.